

COMMERCIAL TRAINING FOR THE  
BLIND AT OVERBROOK

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# The GREGG WRITER

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## Commercial Training for the Blind at Overbrook

By Sarah V Long

*Instructor in the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind*

A PHILADELPHIA educator recently asked, "What can you teach blind people about Commercial work?" When told that students of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, at Overbrook, receive instruction in typewriting, junior business training, bookkeeping, Braille shorthand, business English, commercial law, business arithmetic, and secretarial studies, he gripped the arms of his chair and said, "Well, I don't see how it can be done. It seems impossible." And, being assured that it was quite possible—was, indeed, taking place every day at Overbrook—he replied with vim, "I am coming to Overbrook to see the impossible." He has yet to learn the blind student's slogan:

tation she seats herself at her desk and with swift, accurate fingers records the correspondence by use of a Braille shorthand machine, using a system of dots which represent words, contractions, wordsigns, phrases, and other abbreviations somewhat similar to those used in Gregg shorthand. The characters are recorded on a strip of white paper, about three-quarters of an inch wide, in the form of a roll, which automatically unwinds from the right side of the machine, feeding through the writer towards the left. The main body of the machine is but 8x6½ inches, an extension of six inches being allowed for the paper-holder on the extreme right of the machine. There are six small keys and a spacer which the blind

" S U C C E S S C O M E S I N C A N S ; F A I L U R E I N C A N ' T S . "

The blind pupil not only says *I can* but *I must* do my work much more efficiently than my seeing competitor.

Blind students can operate, much more efficiently than many seeing persons, an Underwood, Royal, Remington, or any other typewriter with universal keyboard.

When a sightless girl is asked to take dic-

person uses in taking her dictation in Braille. This same sightless stenographer runs her deft fingertips along the narrow strip of paper and reads her notes in this wise, while we scan our "hieroglyphics" with perfect vision and not always as accurately as the girl who sees with her fingers. When she completes her transcriptions and hands you the letters







ready for your signature, you look at the well-arranged, nicely centered, attractive looking pages and probably say, "Well, I never! Why, I didn't think it was possible!"

A few days ago, a very capable, highly educated and accomplished lady, the wife of one of our leading American poets, after carefully perusing a letter transcribed from Braille shorthand by one of our students, said, "She certainly does marvelous work. Perhaps if I were blind I might really learn how to use the typewriter well. I have made little progress so far."

### *Training Begun at the Typewriter*

A knowledge of the typewriter, which is the blind person's chief means of communication with the outside world, is most essential and begins when the girl or boy reaches the seventh grade.

The various commercial subjects are given throughout the other grades, including the last, the eleventh. It is desirable for pupils to take the twelfth-grade work in a public high school, where they come in contact with seeing classmates and can form a better conception of how to compete with the seeing neighbor. Overbrook graduates complete the course of Philadelphia High Schools in one year.

### *Bookkeeping Included Also*

The fundamentals of bookkeeping are taught in order to familiarize the student with the principles involved so that he or she can at least keep a cash account and an expense account. Bookkeeping is not given with the idea of sending the student out into the world as a bookkeeper; but the young man who goes into business for himself will understand the basic principles and if he conducts business on a small scale may keep his own accounts in Braille or, if he must depend upon some other person to keep his accounts for him, his general knowledge of the subject will enable him to ask questions intelligently about accounts and he will be able to keep a check on the work of the bookkeeper.

Some blind persons who are doing field work must keep expense accounts. Is it not much better for them to be able to keep their own expense accounts in their own figures (Braille) than to depend entirely upon some guide who may overlook some of the items?

### *Overbrook Aims to Help the Student Help Himself*

The great purpose of the Overbrook school is to help the student to help himself. The commercial subjects are scheduled throughout the course at Overbrook much as they are given

in the public school system. The aim of this course is to teach the blind boy and girl the most practical things about commercial subjects, things which will help him in his daily living, thus making him a better citizen and a more helpful member of society. In other words, the aim is to give him the practical type of education which will fit him to earn his living in this cold, calculating, and exacting world. The average blind person would put that very differently, however, because to him this is really an optimistic, happy, fine old world in which he lives. It may be interesting to note that sightless people are of a very jovial disposition.

### *Ambition and Cheerfulness Characteristic*

The question is often asked "Isn't it depressing to teach the blind?" The answer to this is that teaching the blind is very much like teaching seeing people. The teacher must, of course, devise ways and means of "getting things across" to her pupils, and she must have infinite patience, but blind students, as a whole, have good concentration and are zealous in their efforts towards the acquisition of knowledge. Having one handicap forces them to vitalize and utilize to the fullest extent the other faculties, which become keen, alert, and discriminating to a fine point of excellence in many instances. You will find blind girls and boys in the classroom cheerful, industrious, ambitious, hopeful, helpful, courageous, valiant "heroes of the darkness." One boy in speaking of his Easter vacation said, "I certainly am glad to get a rest, but I'll probably be back 'rarin' to go' on with my work when vacation ends."

### *Graduates Make Excellent Office Records*

The most accurate and efficient students only are selected for Vocational Training. These are prepared for office work, and they have made excellent records for themselves. Among the firms in Philadelphia and vicinity employing Overbrook graduates as typists, stenographers, and Ediphone operators are Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company, R. G. Dun & Company, Atlantic Refining Company, Markowitz Brothers, The Free Library of Philadelphia Department for the Blind, Aetna Life Insurance Company, and The Dupont Company.

Blind boys and girls are being educated to earn their living in various walks of life, in many occupations, and in the field of business the blind typist and stenographer has proved that he or she is accurate, energetic, industrious, painstaking, neat, affable, courteous, and more efficient than many seeing competitors, which leads us directly back to the truth of the slogan:

"Success comes in *CANS*; failure in can'ts."





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